

From Punk to Funk: Some theoretical and analytical reconsiderations

Paula Guerra
University of Porto, Portugal

1. 'Another World': artistic self-production, DIY ethos, practices and roles in the Portuguese underground every daily life

This paper explores the modalities of involvement of young people in underground punk music scenes, as they forge do-it-yourself (DIY) careers through applying skills in production, promotion, composition and performance, acquired through long-term immersion in these scenes. We propose an analysis of the representations of Portuguese punk scene members and Brazilian funk (and other genres) members with regards to DIY, and how they experience and develop scene knowledge, networks and skills, which are crucial as a gateway of these sub-cultural entrepreneurs in the larger labour market (Guerra 2010).

In the case we are analysing, the question of authenticity and its response/alternative to mainstream are key configurations in the DIY ethos of Portuguese punk. The roles and tasks which these scenes and musical pathways undertake in Portuguese punk are marked by heterogeneity, flexibility and opening. The DIY ethos is represented as a strongly valued asset in community-based amateur music practice which goes hand-in-hand with the underground world (Guerra and Bennett 2015; Guerra and Silva 2015). The musical underground appears, then, as a claim from young musicians to a unique artistic expression, or a counterpointed authentic experience against the market and dominant music conventions. It is, however, possible to analyse this space as including multiple socialization processes in a social sphere in which stratification factors, such as class or school capital, are played in a symbolic experimentation, opening up the possibility for new cultural practices and trajectories.

In a preliminary approach, DIY can mean the creation of a symbolic alternative through a (physical or metaphoric) space of self-empowerment, mutual help and alternative social engagement (Holtzman et al. 2007). Alternatively, and more frequently in the Portuguese context, it has meant the associative and recreational practices organized by the participants themselves in a process of empowerment which affects their own personal project. More than anything, DIY serves as a force counter to neoliberalism. The interviewees also evocate the importance of the fanzines, e-zines, posters, illustration and record artwork. Parallel to this, we also see concerns over the construction and customization of clothes and aesthetic accessories. The activities dedicated to merchandising also had daily importance for these actors, frequently noting the possibilities of punk as a way to achieve other artistic activities: painting, design, cinema, video, DJ, photography or literature.

Another set of activities directly related to the D.I.Y. ethos are the squats and the participation or promotion of libertarian cultural centres, as well as the organizing of debates and public speeches. The adoption of a healthier and more sustainable lifestyle through food was also strongly felt, especially in the hardcore punk of the nineties in Portugal. Freeganism, vegetarianism, veganism, alternative medicines such as Chinese medicine or homeopathy were contemporaneous to the consolidation of their DIY lifestyles. All these practices boiled down to a number of causes, such as urban digging, defence of squats, voluntary unemployment, ecological transport promotion – such as bicycles – and the collectivization and exchange of resources towards a return to nature, to the field and to the escape of big cities

Table 1: Ways of living in punk scenes in punk scenes

Ways of living in punk scenes in punk scenes
Activities of production, composition, editing and distributing of music
Organization of events (concerts, music festivals)
Elaboration of fanzines
Learning to play a musical instrument
Squats, libertarian culture centres
Travel, international tours
Local of rehearsals
Start a band
Organization of lectures, debates
Art, painting, design
Food
Clothes, aesthetic accessories

Source: Author.

Table 2: Reasons that brought the social actors to DIY in punk scenes

Reasons to live DIY in punk scenes
To remain independent (doing what they want, how they want it)
To contradict the dominant order of majors and profit
Economic necessity/ scarce resources
Anxiousness for life, doing things fast
To do something useful for the punk scene / society
To help people to grow mentally, getting them to know other realities, other worlds and other people
Creating something that does not exist (eg: clothes)
To increase the own knowledge and experience
To help people with less economic resources
In a political matrix, to contradict capitalism, the common order, constructing an alternative form of being, more anarchist, less hierarchical
Bureaucratic reasons

Source: Author.

It should be interesting to remember here that participants of club cultures, which are defined in that field by their possession of subcultural capital' as noted by Thornton (1995), have been able to get jobs as artists, remixers and producers in the music business, as well as store clerks in subcultural environments (McRobbie 1993). In the same way, the manifestations of DIY subcultural capital of Portuguese punk are visible. Effectively, more than half of the interviewees developed their careers and currently hold jobs which are directly connected to the development of the DIY ethos. Ageing has meant that they engage in subcultural life in a different way, directing it towards the development of work-related practices where the D.I.Y. ethos is fundamental (Hodkinson 2011; Bennett 2006 2013). More than simple distractions, these identifications become a part of the individuals' identities in adult life, affecting their choice of careers.

2. Another type of ‘Holidays in Cambodia’: The DIY from punk to funk in Rio de Janeiro

Let’s start with the now world-famous Anitta (but the same can be said for several other *funkers*). Anitta is a clear example of the confluence of the art of resistance and existence. In 2009 she decided to take an increasingly common step in the funk scene in Rio: launching a YouTube. A simple video, with little work, performed in her bedroom. An example of a DIY strategy boosted by the emergence of new technologies. The truth is that it was enough to catch the attention of a famous DJ, who hired her and who launched her in stardom. Truth be told, it was her first and last DIY strategy. Nevertheless, we cannot hide this increasingly relevant strategy in the funk scene, which reveals, in some cases at least, a digital and technological know-how.

Figure 1 Anitta



Source: <http://ego.globo.com/show/noticia/2013/07/anitta-faz-show-de-shortinho-em-brasil.html> CC 4.0

Figure 2 Anitta and Cardi b, 2019



Source: <https://g1.globo.com/pop-arte/musica/rock-in-rio/2019/noticia/2019/08/13/anitta-mostra-encontro-com-cardi-b-apos-convite-para-parceria-o-bonde-das-funkeiras-vai-crescer.ghtml> CC 4.0

Apart from music, YouTube is at the heart of another funk DIY practice: The *Batalha do Passinho* [*Passinho Battle*]. It all started in 2008 as a challenge among the youth who lived in Rio de Janeiro’s slums launched at each other. The success came after one of those challenges, recorded during a barbecue and titled *Passinho Foda* reached 4 million views on YouTube. The goal was to make complicated dance moves and mixing with funk and other musical genres. Here, Michael Jackson’s music and dance moves are *a must*. Most interesting of all is the role of YouTube in all this process. Young people dance listening on their smartphones to music available on YouTube; with those same smartphones record the whole challenge (everything very amateur-like, with low resolution and no edition) and publish it on YouTube.

So, the use of the smartphone and YouTube allows the demarcation and reconfiguration of the *favela’s* space for playful and sociability purposes. It is also an invitation to participation and, above all, mimic. In a DIY logic, young people seem to say that all that is where’s a will, there’s a way. And, of course, a smartphone and some good music. All of this without any kind of mediation and intermediaries. There is even a modern equivalent to the famous “*This is a chord. This is another. This is a third. Now form a band*” from the *Sniffin’ Glue* fanzine: a ten-minute tutorial (now updated and heavily replicated) in which any neophyte can learn everything he needs to participate in a *Batalha do Passinho*. It explains the history, shows in a didactic way how to make the steps, from the easiest to the most recent (Pereira de Sá, 2007). This is at the heart of DIY: the logic that this musical knowledge, that is, the dancing moves, that has accumulated must be shared with everyone. Free of charge.

Another important question to analyze and demystify is the issue of ostentation, of the *bling bling*. When we see a funk videoclip, the first thing that surprises us is the ostentation: luxury cars, money and gold flying in all directions, etc. In the lyrics are conspicuous references to brands of clothing, cars. In short, the theme of consumption and ostentation is key. So, we must ask ourselves: how compatible is this ostentation with the low socioeconomic stratum? Our interviewees demonstrate that that this world of ostentation and wealth is, roughly speaking, an imagined world. An escape strategy, that is, an attempt to mimic what they see in *gangsta rap* video clips and daily aired by *Globo's* soap operas. Similarly, to imagine being rich and in another social class is an escape strategy from the vicious cycle of poverty mentioned above. Moreover, in almost all cases, we are talking about a fake ostentation: the cars are rented; gold is not gold; the clothes are counterfeited or made at home, in a DIY stylistic strategy very similar to punk (Guerra 2018).

Having said this, it is time to highlight a crucial factor in understanding the DIY strategies carried out by Rio's *funkers*: their socio-economic strata. We are talking about musicians who are practically all of a (very) disadvantaged social stratum and marred by multiple social stigmas. Lopes (2009) even points out that since the 1980s the favela has come to be the opposite of the city. All its residents are potential criminals and must be treated as such by security forces. In addition to a very harsh social reality: poverty, violent crime, there is a state's withdrawal, which is become equivalent of police and more and more the army. Thus, faced with unemployment/underemployment or employment in criminal organizations, for these would-be *funkers* funk is seen as a possibility, if not the only one to escape a trajectory of poverty. The reality of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro is a far cry from the reality usually dealt when we talk about DIY practices (Bennett 2018). It is precisely for this reason that it is fruitful to study the reality of activating DIY strategies in a geographic context that moves away from the Western world (Santos 2014). In the Brazilian *favelas* we have, therefore, an extreme version of the art of resistance and existence.

The resistance in the art of resistance is not in relation to the musical mainstream, but to a more immediate social context, namely those who controlled the favelas: the criminal groups. On the other hand, it is an art of existence, not in the sense of trying to avoid a trajectory of precarious jobs (which are also prevalent), but rather to avoid a trajectory of poverty and violence. It is important to emphasize that we are in the presence of young people with little education who have come from low incomes and scholarly families and therefore in a vicious cycle. And this is where funk opens a whole universe of possibilities.

However, this is not always possible. Or it is only for a very short period of time. The MCs, usually with a favela's background, who have not achieved stardom, spend their career in vans, performing some night's more than five shows in a row and not getting much pay for it. Likewise, practically everyone has second jobs parallel to his musical career to make ends meet. In the background, nothing very different from what was observed in the DIY punk careers (Guerra 2021). Another feature of funk is its ephemeral success: it is usual for an MC to achieve a huge success, which allows him to live of the music for a certain period of time, but due to several factors ends up disappearing from the public eye and the *funker* returns to his old job and life.

Table 3: Ways of living DIY on a day-to-day basis in funk scenes

Ways of living in funk scenes
Amateur videos posted on YouTube (e.g. Anitta or MC Federado & Os Leleks)
Amateur competitions, for eg. Batalha do Passinho, recorded with mobile phones and posted on Youtube
Amateur organizations of parties (bailes funk) in Rio de Janeiro's favelas (city's slums)
DIY tutorials
Homemade clothing
Creation of home studios
Creation of, and utilization of, free apps, for e.g. iFunk-se to make and record music
Creation of free-sharing websites, for e.g. Funk Neurótico

Source: Author.

Table 4: Reasons which brought the social actors to funk scenes' DIY

Reasons to live DIY in funk scenes
To escape from a context of invisibility and/or social failure of the favela
To do something they really like, away from the normative school and professional circuits
To escape and/or leave the favela and the social stigma that causes living there
To remain independent (doing what they want, how they want it)
Economic necessity/ scarce resources
Creating something that does not exist (eg: clothes)
To increase the knowledge and experience with alternative forms of professional capital
To challenge and / or provoke the established circuits of the Brazilian music industry

Source: Author.

3. Some final remarks

After exposing punk and funk, it is possible to analyze some similarities and dissimilarities between them. Above all, we must speak of a huge abyss regarding socioeconomic reality. The social reality in Rio de Janeiro's favelas is marred by a cycle of poverty and violence, absence of state institutions, except for the police and the army. This greatly reduces the possibilities of young people. It is in this reality that the DIY arises. At the level of strategies, we identify, it is possible to gauge the similarity of these two genres: autonomously organized shows, the dissemination of videoclips on YouTube, the increasing use of free software to record and publicize their musical productions.

The big question is by DIY ethos we mean the same in both musical genres. That is, DIY practices are there, but the inherent logic is the same? Let's look at the example of clothing. The punks did it at home, in a subversive appropriation of various styles; the funks also do it, or buy counterfeit, but the logic is different: it is the imitation of an opulent and ostensible reality that is desired. This is not to say that there is not a high dose of irony in this mimic, but the lyrics are full of references to high-end brands. Even in the case of posting amateur videoclips on YouTube, such as the case of Anitta, what we see is not so much an ethos, but more a necessity. A way to try to get out of your (difficult) situation and reach the largest number of people possible. In a society of low social mobility, with a great deal of uncertainty, these DIY strategies are an alternative, if not the only one, path to a professional career in the world of music. That is, in a social reality like that of the Brazilian favelas, DIY strategies reflect much more of an art of existence than an art of resistance (Ferreira, 2016). Not that it is impossible to combine both, but the predominance lies in the first.

However, this can't elude a set of practices that are based on a DIY ethos. See the case of the *Batalha do Passinho* tutorial (Pereira de Sá and Evangelista Cunha, 2014). A clear example of DIY pedagogy. The concern to spread and share a set of knowledge and expertise in the simplest way possible for everyone to participate. The space itself refers much to the DIY ethos, that is, the concern to occupy the public space, to display to passers-by, at least, a cry of existence. Almost "Here is a dance step, here another, now appears in the next battle!"

References:

- Bennett, Andy. "Punk's not dead: The continuing significance of punk rock for an older generation of fans". *Sociology*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2006, pp. 219–235.
- Bennett, Andy. *Music, Style and Aging: Growing Old Disgracefully?*: Temple University Press, 2013.
- Bennett, Andy. "Conceptualising the Relationship Between Youth, Music and DIY Careers: A Critical Overview". *Cultural Sociology*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2018, pp. 140–155.
- Ferreira, Vitor Sérgio. "Aesthetics of Youth Scenes. From Arts of Resistance to Arts of Existence". *Young*, vol. 24, no.1, 2016, pp. 66–81.
- Guerra, Paula and Bennett, Andy. "Never Mind the Pistols? The Legacy and Authenticity of the Sex Pistols in Portugal". *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 38, no.4, 2015, pp. 500–521.
- Guerra, Paula and Silva, Augusto Santos. "Music and more than music: The approach to difference and identity in the Portuguese punk". *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2015, pp. 207–223.
- Guerra, Paula. *A instável leveza do rock: gênese, dinâmica e consolidação do rock alternativo em Portugal*. Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto. PhD's Thesis in Sociology, 2010. Available at: <https://repositorio-aberto.up.pt/handle/10216/56304>

- Guerra, Paula. "Raw Power: Punk, DIY and Underground Cultures as Spaces of Resistance in Contemporary Portugal". *Cultural Sociology*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2018, pp. 241–259.
- Guerra, Paula. "So close yet so far: DIY cultures in Portugal and Brazil". *Cultural Trends*, DOI: 10.1080/09548963.2021.1877085, 2021.
- Hodkinson, Paul. "Ageing in a spectacular "youth culture": Continuity, change and community amongst older Goths". *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 62, p. 2, 2011, pp. 262–282.
- Holtzman, Ben, Hughes, Craig and Van meter, Kevin. "Do it yourself... and the movement beyond capitalism", edited by Stephen Shukaitis, David Graeber and Erika Biddle, *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations, Collective Theorization*, 2007, pp. 44–61.
- Lopes, Adriana Carvalho. "A favela tem nome próprio: a (re)significação do local na linguagem do funk carioca". *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2009, pp. 369–390.
- McRobbie, Angela. "Shut up and dance: Youth culture and changing modes of femininity". *Young*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1993, pp. 13–31.
- Simone, Pereira de Sá. Funk carioca: música eletrônica popular brasileira?! [Funk carioca: Brazilian popular electronic music?!], *Revista ECompós*, vol.10, 2007.
- Simone, Pereira de Sá and Evangelista Cunha, Simone. Controvérsias do funk no YouTube: o caso do Passinho do Volante [Funk music controversies on YouTube: the case of "Passinho do Volante"]. *Revista ECOPOS*, vol. 7, n.º 3, pp.1–14, 2014.
- Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. Paradigm Publishers, 2014.
- Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Wesleyan University Press, 1995.